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ABSTRACT

"Application Performance," a supplemental drill in the Japanese language program at Oregon State University, is described as a way to develop students' communicative competence. The approach is a type of role play, with pairs of students preparing a dialogue according to a situation provided by the instructor and then performed in class. Situations are designed so that students can utilize newly learned grammar and expressions, and drafts of dialogues are checked by the instructor prior to the performance. Application Performance offers students the opportunity to act out Japanese business scenarios and the Japanese way of communication in varying situations. During the process of preparing for an application performance drill, students learn aspects of Japanese culture such as cooperation, teamwork, and consensus building. Details on the Oregon State University methodology are provided, including preparation, performance, grading and feedback, advantages for both students and instructors, disadvantages, and implementation. Contains 3 references. (LB)

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Performing Japanese Business Culture: Developing sociolinguistic competence through "Application Performance"

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Since the Communicative Approach was introduced, developing communicative competence has been one of the preeminent subjects in language teaching. Accordingly the importance of the sociolinguistic aspect has been considered a significant factor in helping students use the language appropriately according to various social contexts. Sociolinguistic competence is especially important in Business Japanese. As Edward T. Hall points out, understanding how the Japanese people communicate is essential in order to succeed in business with the Japanese.[1] This level of culture can be taught through the language learning process if sentence usage based on cultural communication is deliberately taught and demonstrated through drills in class. Communicative competence cannot be developed merely by mechanical drills. Instructors have to design drill sections carefully by setting realistic situations and examine whether students can converse appropriately in a given situation. Otherwise, students may utter grammatically perfect sentences but with sentences sometimes inappropriate to the given situation.

The Japanese language program at Oregon State University has a sizable number of students who want to develop oral communication skills for business purposes. In response to this demand, "Application Performance" has been practiced as a supplemental drill since the fall of 1990, and it has brought favorable results in developing students' communicative competence.

One of the effective methods for intercultural communication training is role-playing or simulation of real-life demands. Richard W. Brislin argues that this method is especially effective in order to make students apply sophisticated concepts from the behavioral and social sciences.[2] Application Performance is a type of role play, but its preparation is quite different. A pair of students prepare a dialogue

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according to a situation provided by their instructor and perform their dialogue in class. Situations are designed so that students can utilize newly learned grammar and expressions in their dialogue. Drafts of dialogues are checked by instructors before students perform them. All preparations are done outside of class. "Application Performance" offers students the opportunity to act out Japanese business scenarios and the Japanese way of communication in varying situations. During the process of preparing for an application performance drill, students learn aspects of Japanese culture such as cooperation, teamwork, and consensus building.

With this paper, I would like to introduce "Application Performance" as practiced at Oregon State University and its methodology.

METHOD

Preparation

1. Give students a handout describing a situation in which they create a dialogue. Detailed directions such as vocabulary, sentence structures and expressions which students may possibly use are also given. The following is an example of one of the handouts given to the first year Japanese students during the spring of 1991. By this time, students had studied Japanese for about 7 months.

JPN 113 APPLICATION PERFORMANCE 1

> Make a team of two. Based on the given situation, develop a dialogue applying and utilizing the expressions and patterns you have learned. Review Lesson 7A, B and Lesson 8A. Be sure to work in a team so that the individuals will have a chance to review what he or she has learned. Bring the draft to the instructor's office for checking. Both members of a team must be present

while the draft is checked. Use the sign up sheets for an appointment. These sign up sheets are located by the instructors' offices.

Situation: A and B (businessmen) happen to bump into each other and talk about what they are doing these days such as business trips, conference vactions, etc. A and B can talk or ask each other about their in-group and out-group friends. Then A invites B to a party which is planned for their mutual friend, C.

Submit a clean rewritten dialogue at the time of performance.

Think how you can use the following expressions and patterns:

Copula gerund Verbal gerund+ kudasai
Nominal+ninalimasu Honorifics Verbal+taidesu
Nalunodo/tanoshimidesu/osakini/dennwa o kakemasu/jyoozu/heta

2. After such a handout is issued, two or three students are matched up so that they can write a draft and practice their performance together. No student is allowed to work alone, and the importance of cooperation is stressed throughout the preparation process.

3. Upon completion of the draft, each pair of students makes an appointment with the instructor and has their draft checked. Correction of a draft is done in the students' presence, and each session takes 10 to 15 minutes. There are three main items to be checked: (a) Grammar and usage are corrected. (b) The instructor suggests how students can utilize newly learned sentences, structures, and expressions. These suggestions become increasingly more important as their level of competence increases, because advanced students are able to create dialogues without using any newly learned items. (c) The instructor also checks and reinforces cultural sensitivities. Students sometimes can create a sentence which is grammatically perfect but inappropriate to use in certain situations. For example, when person B asks his or her colleague A to make photocopies, A's reaction can be "hai,

iidesuyo." However if B is a manager, it should be "hai, wakarimashita." If B ranks much higher than A or B is A's customer in a department store or in general business, the proper response should be " hai, kashikomarimashita."

Another example of the instructor pointing out cultural sensitivity would be a decision making process where, for example, two people, A and B, are talking about a date for a meeting. As a response to A's question, "itsu ga gotsugou ga yoroshii deshooka?" (Which day is convenient?) there are four possible ways B can answer. "Asatte ga iidesu." (the day after tomorrow is good.) is the least desirable one because it is a statement and does not give A the chance to show his or her preference. Three other options are "asatte wa doo desuka?" (How about the day after tomorrow?), "asatte wa ikaga desuka?" (How about the day after tomorrow?) or "asatte wa ikagadeshooka?" (How about the day after tomorrow?). The last one, "asatte wa ikagadeshooka?" is the best in this case. "Ikaga" is the polite form of "doo", and "deshooka" is less direct than "desuka."

In this way, the instructor reinforces one of the Japanese language's interesting features: The more indirect, the more polite it becomes. The instructor may also add cultural information at this point indicating that this is one of the reasons why negotiations with the Japanese take a long time and that consensus plays an important role in Japanese society.

The instructor usually does not give correct answers during the session. Instead, he or she points out students' mistakes and encourages them to come up with better responses. Only when they run out of time does the instructor give the appropriate answers.

4. Each pair has to rewrite a corrected draft and submits both the original draft and the rewritten one on their performance day.

5. Students memorize their lines practicing together. Cooperation is also stressed here. A student who memorizes only his or her own lines does not contribute much to the quality of the performance. If the student's partner has a memory slip, he or she cannot help the partner. As a result their performance often ends chaotically.

Performance

1. Each pair performs their dialogue in front of their classmates in class.

2. After each performance, the instructor asks content questions based on the dialogue performed.

3. If mistakes are made, the instructor corrects them after each performance. If the instructor does not correct these mistakes immediately after a performance, some students, usually the good ones, are often confused because not correcting mistakes is denying them the correct answers.

Grading and Feedback

1. Both the original draft and the performance are graded. Criteria for grading the original draft are, first, how well students utilized newly introduced sentence structures, expressions and vocabulary, and, second, how well they expanded their dialogue. Grammatical errors are of least concern, for the instructor must encourage the students to experiment with new concepts. In performance, criteria are intonation/pronunciation, memorization and naturalness. Naturalness is a matter of rhythm and speed of speech. Some students, in a hurry to say what they have memorized before they forget, sound like robots.

2. Prompt feedback is very important. The instructor usually gives a report sheet with a short comment on their performance. For example, "If you pay more attention to segmentations of a sentence, you will sound more natural. Think where you can breathe or stop." Most comments address their performance, because comments on their draft are usually stated while the instructor is checking it.

Advantages for students

1. This method provides students an excellent opportunity to develop their language creativity. Although an instructor demonstrates usage of sentence structures and expressions through situational drills in class, there is always room for students to experiment on how to use them.

2. Cultural competence can be reinforced especially where Japanese communication style is emphasized. Although an instructor can explain Japanese communication style in class, it is difficult for some students to internalize those concepts. By means of the short correction session, utterances offensive to Japanese are brought to the students' attention. Since students work in groups or pairs, they learn how to compromise with each other, which is highly valued in Japanese society.

3. An instructor can encourage each student to become more aware of his or her weak points of grammar. Each student has different weak points, and the instructor can give directions on how to address them. Copying a corrected draft can also help students realize their weak points. If they do not understand their instructor's corrections or miscopy corrections, it indicates that they have serious problems.

4. Since the dialogue is written, it is easy for the students to recognize mistakes. When not written, a student's reaction to the instructor's correction often is, "Did I say that?" Another good point about the correction process is that the student's attitude is very sincere. Since they write what they really want to express, they are eager to know why their sentences fail to pass their instructor.

Advantages for instructors

1. Instructors are able to observe students' achievements; i.e., how well students understand functions of newly introduced sentence structures and expressions and that they utilize them in an appropriate manner.

2. The correction session provides the instructor with the opportunity to review his or her explanation of structures, expressions and vocabulary and thereby to improve his or her teaching. If many students make the same kinds of errors, it indicates that he or she has not explained them well enough.

3. The relationship between students and instructors becomes closer. Students often comment on class activities and teaching style. For instructors, it is another opportunity to learn about students and to get feedback about their class from students. This session also gives the instructor the chance to explain to students the objectives of the course and teaching philosophy. Although objectives of the course are stated in the syllabus, most students do not pay much attention to them.

Disadvantages

It demands much time from both the students and instructors.

IMPLEMENTATION

We usually schedule two to three application performances each term, and application performances are linked to a midterm and final oral exam. Situations provided for applications are modified, and the instructor plays the role of a partner for each student. For instance, the example given in Application Performance 1 during the Spring of 1991 was modified slightly and used as a part of the final oral exam:

> Colleagues A and B are talking in the office. B is recently transferred to this office. A tried to reach B on the phone last night, but B was not at home. B explains why he was not there. A explains that the reason why he called B last night was that he wants to invite B to a social get-together at A's home. B accepts A's invitation. A explains how to get to his

home. Expand the dialogue: For example, B can ask what A likes so that B can think of gifts he can bring to A on that day. B is not supposed to ask A what B can bring for A.

The content of the conversation during the final oral exam is close to the situation in Application 1, but students are expected to expand the conversation even more by using new concepts introduced since Application 1.

CONCLUSION

In business, it is a matter of course to conduct detailed market research in order to sell a product. This procedure can also be applied to language teaching. Instructors should analyze their students' needs before they start making a curriculum and setting goals. If there is a relatively large demand in oral communication or the majority of students are business or business related majors, acquiring knowledge of Japanese style communication is essential. In his book How to Do Business with the Japanese, Mark Zimmerman says, "Those who don't learn Japanese will find a real barrier erected between themselves and real understanding of the Japanese. In Japanese it is not only what is said that is important - how it is said can be far more important."[3] This is especially true in business. Therefore, instructors should always be alert and catch students' inappropriate expressions because students can utter sentences which are grammatically correct but inappropriate. For example, instructors correct students' conjugation mistakes. However, misuse of "arigatoo" and "arigatoogozaimasu" is sometimes ignored simply because the both means the same - "Tank you": if a speaker states "arigatoo" to his/her manager, this mistake can be very serious. The more fluent the speaker becomes, the worse the impact of this mistake because Japanese expect the speaker to act like a Japanese. In addition to this Japanese expectation, it is difficult for Japanese to correct this sort of mistake in comparison with conjugation mistakes. They have to explain that they are socially ranked higher than the speaker, which goes against their modesty.

This error is very difficult to correct or even catch if only mechanical drills are conducted in class. Through situational drills, the instructor can observe if students have understood not only the structure of a sentence, but also its function and usage as well. He or she can also demonstrate how to apply it. Through Application Performance, the instructor can reinforce students' language creativity and help students attain communicative competence.

Notes

1. Hall, Edward T. (1987) Hidden Differences. Anchor Books, New York , p.4

2. Brislin, Richard W. (1989) Intercultural Communication training. In M. Asante & W. Gudykunst (Eds.), Handbook of International & Intercultural Communication (p.445). Newbury Park, CÅ: Sage
3. Zimmerman, Mark (1985) How to Do Business with the Japanese: A Strategy for Success. Random House, New York, p.145

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